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ABSTRACT

Noting that everyone who interacts with a young child is a teacher, this booklet for preschool teachers and child care providers draws from scientifically based research about what they can do to help children develop their language abilities, increase their knowledge, become familiar with books and other printed materials, learn letters and sounds, recognize numbers, and learn to count. The booklet provides examples of ways to create an environment in the preschool classroom that will nurture children's natural curiosity and their zest for learning. Following an introduction, the booklet's sections cover: (1) Creating the Learning Environment for Young Children; (2) Reading Aloud to Children; (3) Developing Listening and Speaking Skills; (4) Teaching about the Sounds of Spoken Language; (5) Teaching about Print; (6) Teaching about Books; (7) Teaching about Letters; (8) Building Children's Background Knowledge and Thinking Skills; (9) Teaching about Numbers and Counting; (10) Checking Children's Progress; (11) Communicating with Parents and Caregivers; and (12) Some Helpful Terms To Know. The booklet concludes with a list of suggested readings on early childhood education. (HTH)

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Teaching Our Youngest: A Guide for Preschool Teachers, Child Care and Family Providers.

Bonnie Armbruster, Fran Lehr, and Jean Osborn

Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force
U.S. Department of Education
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

March 2002

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A Guide for Preschool Teachers, Child Care & Family Providers

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A Guide for Preschool Teachers, Child Care & Family Providers

Prepared by
The Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force
U.S. Department of Education
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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"We all have the duty to call attention to the science and seriousness of early childhood cognitive development—because the ages between birth and age five are the foundation upon which successful lives are built."

Laura Bush

White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development, July 26, 2001

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Introduction

Everyone who interacts with a young child is a teacher. This booklet is written for you. As preschool teachers and child care providers, you have both the wonderful opportunity and the important responsibility to teach and nurture the learning skills of our youngest children. The years from birth through age five are a time of extraordinary growth and change. It is in these years that children develop the basic knowledge, understanding, and interests they need to reach the goal of being successful learners, readers, and writers. All young children deserve experiences that will help them to achieve this goal.

You play an important role in ensuring that "no child is left behind." You spend many hours with children and the right kind of activities can help your children tremendously. You can be especially helpful to those children who have limited learning experiences at home.

This booklet draws from scientifically based research about what you can do to help children to develop their language abilities, increase their knowledge, become familiar with books and other printed materials, learn letters and sounds, recognize numbers, and learn to count. There are many examples of strategies you can use for teaching these skills. Also included are examples of ways to create an environment in your preschool classrooms that will nurture children's natural curiosity and their zest for learning. You hold the key to their future academic success.

Creating the Learning Environment for Young Children

Effective preschool classrooms are places where children feel well cared for and safe. They are places where children are valued as individuals and where their needs for attention, approval, and affection are supported. They are also places where children can be helped to acquire a strong foundation in the knowledge and skills needed for school success.

- Young children need teachers who welcome all children to their classrooms, including children from various cultures, whose first language is not English and children who have disabilities.

- Young children need teachers who take time to work with them individually, in small groups, and sometimes with the entire class—to help them develop their cognitive and social skills, their language abilities, and their interest in learning new things about the world.

- Young children need instruction to develop the thinking, language, and early literacy skills needed for continued school success.

Effective preschool teachers and child care providers:

- Know when children can figure out new ideas and concepts on their own and when it is important to explain things to them step-by-step.
- Encourage children to participate in classroom activities and to honor the classroom rules.
- Listen to what the children say and expand upon their language, building their vocabulary and background knowledge.
- Know when to teach directly, when to provide time for exploration and discovery, when to practice skills, and when to encourage creative expression.
- Plan activities that have a purpose and that challenge children.
- Know how to help children learn to work together and to resolve their conflicts.
- Encourage children to respect each other's time and personal belongings.
- Provide many opportunities for conversations between and among children and with adults.
- Know how to establish and maintain order in a classroom but in a manner that permits the children to learn how to participate in and enjoy learning.

How teachers arrange their classrooms contribute to how they work with their children and to how the children spend their time.

Sample Classroom

Ms. Coleman is unhappy with her classroom layout. In her classroom, furniture is lined up along the walls. It has one big open space in the middle of the room. Ms. Coleman's children spend a lot of time in that open space. They sometimes make a lot of noise that is hard for her to control. She wants her classroom to better support the learning of the children. Instead of one big space, she wants to establish a number of smaller, quiet areas where children can go to examine books, write and draw, engage in social play, and work with puzzles and other games. Here is what Ms. Coleman does:

- She uses cupboards, screens, and tables to divide her classroom into children's work areas. She does this to better define the activities that will take place in different parts of the room. She makes and puts up these labels for the areas: Library Corner, Games and Puzzles Table, Writing Table, Blocks Place, Art Studio, Housekeeping Room, and Science Space.
- She makes sure that the all of the children can comfortably sit on the big rug next to the Library Corner. She knows she will have them sit there when she and the entire class read books and do other activities together.
- She provides dress-up clothes and other props in the Blocks Place and the Housekeeping Room. These will be the areas in which the children engage in dramatic play. She provides writing materials—pencils, crayons, and paper—next to the Writing Table but also in the Art Studio, Blocks Place, and Housekeeping Room. The children often include writing into their artwork as well as their dramatic play. She encourages them to label their drawings and to write out lists and plans for their dramatic play.
- She displays many examples of printed materials. Yet she does not display excessive print or print that is not meaningful. The children are able to see labels, signs, and printed directions in the places that count.
- Alphabet displays on a nearby wall were placed at the children's eye level as they sit at writing tables.
- The children's work was displayed throughout the room,
  She changes the labels as different toys, games, and puzzles came into the classroom. She has the children provide the names and sometimes the signs. As the children learn more about print, the labels that appear in the classroom get longer and more detailed.
- She places a rug and big pillows in the Library Corner, making it a cozy, inviting place. The children quickly learn that they can go there with several friends to look at and discuss books and magazines.

- She makes sure that the bookcases contain a variety of books—traditional storybooks, modern storybooks, alphabet books, number books, wordless pictures books, and books about animals, plants, and the peoples who live in different parts of the world. She includes books that portray the cultural and language backgrounds of the children in the classroom. She keeps current issues of magazines for young children on an easy-to-reach shelf.
  Most of the books on the bookcases come from the classroom library, but others are part of a revolving collection of books that Ms. Coleman gets from the public library. She changes the collection of books every few weeks, based on the topics being studied by the children and on their current interests.
- As the year progresses and the children create their own books, she sets up a special display shelf to hold the children's work.
- She prepares one shelf for cassette players, headphones, and tapes for the children to use to listen to stories.

Reading Aloud to Children

In the landmark 1986 review *Becoming a Nation of Readers,* the Commission on Reading, sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English, called reading aloud to children "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for success in reading." The best time to begin reading books with children is when they are infants—babies as young as six weeks old enjoy being read to and looking at pictures. By age two or three, children begin to develop an awareness of printed letters and words. They see adults around them reading, writing, and using printed words for many purposes. Toddlers and preschoolers are especially ready to learn from adults reading to and with them.

Reading aloud to young children is important because it helps them to learn:

1. About printed letters and words.
2. About the meaning of many words.
3. About books and how they work.
4. About the world they live in.
5. About how written language sometimes differs from everyday conversation.
6. About the fun they can have while reading.

Here are some suggestions for reading aloud to children.

- **Make reading books a pleasurable, enjoyable experience**. Choose a comfortable place where the children can sit near you. Help them feel safe and secure. Be enthusiastic about reading. Show the children that reading is an interesting and rewarding activity. When children enjoy being read to, they will grow to love books and be eager to learn to read.

- **Read to children frequently**. Read to the children in your care several times a day. Establish regular times for reading during the day, but also find others opportunities to read:
    1. Start or end the day with a book.
    2. Read to children after a morning play period (it helps settle them down, too!).
    3. Read to them during snack time or before nap time.

- **Help the children to learn as you read.** Offer explanations, make observations, and help the children to notice new information. Explain words that they may not know. Point out how the pictures in a book relate to the story. If the story takes place in an historic era or in an unfamiliar place, give children some background information so that they will better understand and enjoy the story. Talk about the characters' actions and feelings.

Find ways to compare the book that you are reading with what the children have been doing in the classroom.

- **Ask children questions as you read.** Ask questions that help children connect the story with their own lives or that help them to compare the book with other books that they have read. Ask questions that help the children to notice what is in the book and ask them to predict what happens next.

◇ This story is about Gregory, a little goat that didn't like to eat what his parents thought he should. Do you feel this way sometimes?
◇ Does this book remind you of any other books we've read? Yes, we've read other books about Clifford, the big red dog. Do you remember Clifford? What do you remember about him?
◇ What is similar about Gregory and Clifford? What is different?

- **Encourage children to talk about the book.** Have a conversation with the children about the book you are reading. Answer their questions. Welcome their observations, and add to what they say. Continue to talk about the book after you have read it. Invite the children to comment on the story. Ask them to talk about their favorite parts and encourage them to tell the story in their own words.

◇ Why was Max sent to bed without dinner? Well, I think he was being punished for not being a good boy. The book said he "made mischief," which means he got into trouble. Sometimes children who have "made mischief" get sent to their rooms and miss a meal.
◇ Yes, that bird in the picture does have a seed in its mouth. It's probably going to eat it.

Reading Aloud with Children

In this example, a teacher reads Eric Hill's "lift-the-flap" book *Spot's First Walk*. Notice how the experience is like a conversation. The teacher invites the children's comments and answers their questions. She builds on what they say and encourages them to make sense of what is happening in the story. She tells the children new information that will help them to understand and enjoy the book more.

Book	**Teacher and Children**
Not in there, Spot.	T: Where's Spot going? C: Out there. T: Yes, he's going through a hole in the fence. C: What's he going to do? T: I don't know. Let's read and find out. (*lifts flap*)
Hello!	T: Who's saying "hello"? Do you know what that is? C: No. T: It's a snail. . .a little animal that you might find in a garden. See the shell on its back? (*points to shell*)
Watch out!	T: Who's saying, "watch out!"? C: That bird (*points to bird*). T: That's right! The blue bird that's sitting on the shovel is telling Spot to watch out. C: Why? T: Maybe Spot could get into trouble if he goes in that little blue house. Let's see what happens. (*lifts flap*)
(Picture of angry-looking cat with "!!!" in speech cat balloon)	C: Oh, it's a cat! T: Yes, a cat that looks as big as Spot. Does that look happy to see Spot? C: He looks like a mean cat. T: Yes, he looks mean to me, too. I don't think he's happy to see Spot. That's probably why the bird told Spot to watch out. C: I'd be scared. T: Me, too! C: What's this? (*points to exclamation marks in speech balloon)* T: These are called exclamation marks. Cats can't talk, but they make a hissing sound when they get angry (*makes a hissing sound*). I think that's the writer's way of showing us that the cat is hissing at Spot and telling him to get away.

- **Read many kinds of books**. Children need to hear different kinds of books. Storybooks can help children to learn about other times, cultures, and peoples; they can help them understand how others think, act, and feel. Informational books can help children learn about the world around them. These books introduce children to important concepts and vocabulary that they will need for success in school. Read books that relate to the children's backgrounds. Read books that are about their experiences, cultures, languages, and interests. Read books with characters and situations both similar and dissimilar to children's lives so they can learn about the world.

- **Choose books to help you teach**. Use alphabet books to help you teach the names of the letters and the sounds that each letter represents and use counting books to teach children how to count and to recognize numbers. Use poetry or rhyming books to support your teaching of phonological awareness. Use big books (oversized books that your children can easily see) to point out letters, words, and other features of print and to teach book handling. Choose stories that help children learn about social behavior, for example books about friendship to help children learn to share and cooperate. Also choose stories that show children how the world around them works. Help them understand what is happening with the eggs that are hatching in your science area.

- **Reread favorite books**. Children love to hear their favorite books over and over again. Hearing books read several times helps children understand and notice new things. For example, they may figure out what an unfamiliar word means when they have heard the story several times. They may notice repeated sound patterns. If you point out some letters and words as you read the book repeatedly, children also may pick up specific words that are easily recognized and specific letter-sound relationships.

Types of Books for Reading Aloud

Alphabet books. Alphabet books usually feature the capital and lowercase forms of a letter on each page and one or more pictures of something that begins with the most common sound that the letter represents.

Counting (or number) books. In these books, each page usually presents one number and shows a corresponding number of items (two monkeys, five dinosaurs, and so forth).

Concept books. These books are designed to teach particular concepts that children need to know in order to succeed in school. Concept books may teach about colors, shapes, sizes (big, little), or opposites (up, down). They may focus on concepts (farm or zoo animals, families around the world, trucks, or places to live).

Nursery rhymes. These predictable books include many verses that are dependable favorites with children. Because they often contain rhymes and repeated verses, nursery rhymes appeal to children and are easy to remember and recite.

Repetitious stories and pattern books. In these predictable books, a word or phrase is repeated throughout the story, forming a pattern. After the first few pages, your children may be able to "read along" because they know the pattern.

Traditional literature. Traditional literature includes fairy tales, folk tales, fables, myths, and legends. Through these beloved stories, children become familiar with many different times, cultures, and traditions. Some stories, such as Cinderella, have been adapted from different cultures.

Wordless picture books. These books tell stories through pictures, without using words. Wordless picture books give children the opportunity to tell stories themselves as they "read," an activity that most children enjoy. In telling their stories, children develop language skills; they also get a sense of the sequence of events in stories.

Developing Listening and Speaking Skills

We need to put to rest the old saying, "Children should be seen and not heard." Research shows beyond question that it is through having many opportunities to talk as well as to listen to teachers and peers that children gain language skills so valuable for their success in reading and writing.

It is important for young children to be able to:

- Listen carefully for different purposes, such as to get information or for enjoyment.
- Use spoken language for a variety of purposes.
- Follow and give simple directions and instructions.
- Ask and answer questions.
- Use appropriate volume and rate when they speak.
- Participate in discussions and follow the rules of polite conversation, such as staying on a topic and taking turns.
- Use language to express and describe their feelings and ideas.

It is important for teachers to:

- Ask open-ended questions that invite children to expand upon their answers.
- Present new words to children to expand their vocabularies.
- Respond to questions and let children take the conversational
- Allow children to take the conversational lead.
- Respond to children's questions and let them build their language skills.

Here are some things that you can do to help develop and expand your children's listening and speaking skills:

- Engage children in conversation throughout the day.

◇ Why did you color the house orange, Rana?
◇ Look at all the birds at our birdfeeder this morning. What different ones do you see?

- When reading aloud to the children, encourage them to predict what will happen in the story, to comment on the story, and to make connections between the story and their personal experiences.

◇ What do you think will happen when Boomer gets on the school bus?
◇ What did you like best about Boomer's day in school?
◇ What's the funniest thing your pet does?

- Play games that will focus children's attention on the importance of listening carefully.

◇ Put your heads down and close your eyes. Listen very carefully. Can you hear the lawn mower outside? Can you hear water dripping in the sink? What else do you hear?

- Gently reinforce the rules of good listening and speaking throughout the day.

◇ Connor, please don't talk while Yi is asking a question. You'll get your turn.
◇ Tyler, thank Joann for helping you with your drawing.
◇ Ask before you take a book. Someone else may be using it.
◇ Only ask questions about the book right now. We'll talk about other things later.

- Capitalize on routine opportunities to have the children follow or give directions.

◇ It's time for snack. I want the boys to come to the round table and the girls to come to the square table.
◇ Kaylee, please go to the bookrack and bring me the book with the red flower on its cover.
◇ Mitch, go to the block box. Get two green blocks. Okay, please take them to Julio.
◇ Tanya, will you tell Howie how to put this puzzle together?

Teaching about the Sounds of Spoken Language

The name for the ability to notice and work with the sounds in language is *phonological awareness*. Young children who have phonological awareness notice, for example, that words can begin or end with the same sound—that *bag*, *ball*, and *bug* all begin with the sound of *b*; that words can rhyme; and that sentences are made up of separate words. Research shows that how quickly children will learn to read often depends on how much phonological awareness they have when they begin kindergarten.

It is important for young children to be able to:

- Repeat rhyming songs and poems, identify rhymes, and generate rhyming words when playing a rhyming game.
- Recognize the common sounds at the beginning of a series of words (alliteration).
- Isolate the beginning sounds in familiar words.

Here are some things that you can do to help your children learn about the sounds of spoken language:

- Choose books to read aloud that focus on sounds, rhyming, and alliteration.

- Have the children sing or say a familiar nursery rhyme or song. Repeat it several times, raising your voice on words that rhyme. Then have the children join in, saying the rhyming words with you.

- Invite the children to make up new verses of familiar songs or rhymes by changing the beginning sounds of words.

◇ Let's say "Humpty Dumpty" again, but this time I want you to make it "Lumpty Gumpty."

- Play word games with the children. When possible, use children's names in the games.

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- ◇ How many words can you say that rhyme with *clock*?
- ◇ Which of these words rhyme: *snow, lamb,* and *go?*
- ◇ Pat, can you say a word that rhymes with your name?
- ◇ Would everyone whose name begins with the same sound as *happy* please stand up.

Teaching about Print

From the time they are born, print is a part of most children's lives. Words decorate their blankets, sheets, and PJs. They appear on the posters and pictures that decorate their walls. They are on the blocks and toys that they play with and in the books that are read to them. But although printed words may be all around them, young children are not often aware of them. And, of course, they do not yet understand the role printed words will play in their lives.

It is important for young children to:

- Recognize print in their surroundings.
- Understand that print carries meaning.
- Know that print is used for many purposes.
- Learn about print through experimental writing.

Children learn about print by seeing many examples. In your classroom, these examples should include:

- Books and other printed materials for the children to look at and pretend to read. For very young children, have soft-covered and board books that are washable.
- Photographs and pictures with captions and labels.
- Posters, calendars, and bulletin board displays that feature print.
- Labels and signs for special areas of the classroom.

In addition, you should also have available a variety of props with printed letters and words for the children to use in dramatic play. Here are a few suggestions:

- Menus, order pads, and play money.
- Recipes, empty food cartons, and marked plastic measuring spoons and cups.
- Old telephone books, memo pads, envelopes, and address labels.
- Price tags, stickers, large paper bags (with printed words).
- Toy cars, trucks, and farm and construction equipment (with printed words).

Of course, always keep plenty of pencils, makers, and crayons handy for the children to use.

Here are some things that you can do to help your children learn about letters and words.

- Show the children that printed materials are all around them by reading examples from everyday life.

◇ Jessie, that's a great T-shirt you're wearing today. It has words on it. What do you think those words say?
◇ Look at the sign above the door. It say, "Exit." What do you think that word means?

- Have the children help you make signs and labels for projects or for special areas in the room.

◇ We need to make a sign for the fish tank. Let's see can you help me? "F-I-S-H", we need to start with a "F."
◇ Wow, you made a castle. Do you want to make a sign for your castle? Do you want the sign to say "Jack and Harry's castle"? OK, J-A-C-K, (say slowly, sounding out the word) "J" (say the sound) we need to start with a "J" (say and write the letter).
◇ We use this door to come in and this one to go out. These signs I've made say, "In" and "Out."

- Draw the children's attention to the many ways that you use printed letters and words everyday.

◇ I'm going grocery shopping later, so I wrote this list of the things I need to buy. Can you tell me how many things are on the list?
◇ I want your parents to know how well you're doing, so I'm sending them an e-mail.
◇ Here's today's newspaper. I like to read papers every morning so that I know what's happening in the world.
◇ Let's go over to the computer and see if we can find out some more information about butterflies.
◇ Look at this menu I brought from my favorite restaurant. Here are some pictures of their desserts. This one looks good. It is brown. Lets read the name of it. *Ch, ch, ch-o-c-o-late* (sound out slowly) *c-a-k-e*. How many words does it have?

- Distinguish between children's beginning writing and drawing. (example: A drawing of a cat with the name of cat. You drew a picture of your cat. I like your gray cat. What is your cat's name? Oh, I see you wrote his name over here.)

Teaching about Books

As adults, we do not pay much attention to the routine features of books and book handling. We just *know* that, in English, we read from left to right and from the top to the bottom of a page, that words are separated by spaces, and that sentences begin with capital letters and end with some kind of punctuation mark. We forget that when we were children, we also had to *learn* these things.

It is important for young children to:

- Know how to handle books appropriately.
- Recognize book features such as the front and back, rightside-up and upside-down.
- Recognize that a book has a title, was written by an author, and has drawings done by an illustrator.
- Recognize that printed letters and words run from left-to-right and from top-to-bottom across the page.

Here are some things that you can do to help children learn about books:

- Help the children learn how to hold a book and show them that we read from front to back and that we go through a book page by page. For older children, point out features of books such as the front cover and the title.

◇ This is the front of the book. It tells you the name of the book and who wrote it and drew the pictures. This is the name of our book: *If You Give a Pig a Pancake*. Here's the name of the woman who wrote it: Laura Numeroff, and here's the name of the woman who drew the pictures: Felicia Bond.

- As you read from big books, occasionally emphasize the direction in which we read print by pointing to the first word on a line and running a finger or hand beneath the words as you read from left to right and from top to bottom.

Teaching about Letters

Children who enter kindergarten knowing many letter names tend to have an easier time learning to read than do children who have not learned these skills. In fact, it is unreasonable to believe that children will be able to read until they can recognize and name a number of letters. To read, children recognize letters and know how to connect these individual letters—and sometimes combinations of letters—with the sounds of spoken words.

It is important for young children to be able to:

- Recognize and name letters.
- Recognize beginning letters in familiar words (especially their names).
- Recognize both capital and lower case letters.
- Relate some letters to the specific sounds they represent

As you plan your instruction, make sure that the children in your care have many opportunities to learn to identify letters, to write letters, and to find out how letters function to represent the sounds in words.

In your classroom, you should have (at children's eye level) displays of the alphabet, such as large alphabet cards. Alphabet blocks, large plastic or paper letters, and materials for making letters, such as yarn, pipe cleaners, and play dough should also be available. A writing center can be creating in your room where children can go and experiment with different writing tools. And, of course, you should have a collection of alphabet books to read aloud and alphabet songs to teach the children.

Here are some things that you can do to help your children learn about letters:

- Encourage the children to notice that letters are all around them.

- Encourage the children to play with letters.

◇ Give children plastic alphabet tiles and encourage them to spell their names and other words they like.
◇ Say to the children, "See the letters on this keyboard? Press one and watch the letter come up on the screen."
◇ Play games with line segments where children try to guess which letter you are writing as you draw parts of the letter one at a time
◇ Allow children to experiment with letters, using magnetic letters on the chalkboard.

- Help the children write letters.

◇ Provide children with crayons and markers to explore letters
◇ Use a sand or salt tray and finger paints to allow children to play with writing letters.
◇ Look, I made the letter "C" out of play dough. Now, can you make a letter "C"? Good. What other letter should we make together?
◇ Please write your names on your picture. I will help you start the "S" is you need help.

- Help the children learn the alphabet.

◇ Let's sing "The Alphabet Song."
◇ Say the name of each letter as I point to it on the alphabet chart.
◇ I'm going to read you an alphabet book. Help me read the alphabet book.

- Help the children hear the sounds in each letter's name.

◇ Linn, your name begins with an *L* (emphasizes beginning sound). Who else has a name that begins with the same sound? Yes, Larry! Larry's name also begins with an *L*.
◇ I'm going to read you an alphabet book. On each page, there is a letter and a picture of something that starts with the sound that this letter represents. Let's say the name of the letter first. Then, we'll say the name of the picture. Then, we'll think of some other words or names that start with the same sound. Here we go: *A—A* is for acorn). What other words start like apple? Adam. Okay! Adam, your name starts like apple. What else? *Animal*! Right! *Animal* starts like apple, with the letter *A*.
◇ Here are some words that begin with the letter *M*: *mother, monkey, mud, map.* What sound do you hear at the beginning of those words? (Emphasize the beginning sound.)

Building Children's Background Knowledge and Thinking Skills

The more children know about their world, the easier it is for them to read and learn when they get to school. You have an important role to play in helping children learn new information, ideas, and vocabulary and how to use this knowledge to become full participants in their own learning. You can help children to connect new information and ideas to what they already know and understand.

It is important for young children to be able to:

- Know about what things are and how they work.
- Learn information about the world around them.
- Extend their use of language and develop vocabulary.
- Develop children's abilities to figure things out and to solve problems.

Here are some things that you can do to help children build knowledge:

- Provide them with opportunities to develop concepts by exploring and talking about their experiences work with familiar classroom equipment and materials in a variety of ways.
    - Children learn about substances and changes in substances by cooking.
    - Children learn about plants by planting seeds and taking care of the growing plants.
    - Children learn about social situations and interactions in real interactions and dramatic play.

- Share informational books.
    - Children enjoy learning about their world. They enjoy looking at books about things of interest to them—perhaps how plants grow, how baby animals develop, or how vehicles carry people and things. Fortunately, many wonderful informational books are available today—books with spectacular photographs or illustrations and descriptions that children can understand easily.

- Teach the children new words and concepts. Explain new vocabulary in the books that you read with them. Teach them and name all of the things in classroom. In everyday talk with children, introduce words and concepts that they may not know.

◇ It's *silent* time now. "Silent" means that we don't say anything.
◇ Look at the seeds we planted. They're *sprouting*! See how the seedling is pushing through the dirt? See the tiny green leaves?

- Have children write, draw, build, and engage in dramatic play. These experiences will help the children to incorporate what they are learning with what they already know.

- Take the children on field trips. Any time children go some place, especially some place new to them, they can learn something. Even if it is just a walk around the block, children can learn something new if you talk with them. Point out things they might not notice. Explain events that are taking place. Answer the questions the children have and praise them for looking and learning. Before you go to a place the children have never been, such as a zoo or a museum, discuss what they will be seeing and learning. After the trip, have the children talk about their experiences.

- Provide a variety of materials for your children to explore. For example, wire, cardboard, water, tubes, tissue paper, and funnels.

◇ See that sign? It says S-T-O-P (sound out slowly), "STOP."
◇ Look! You see the round, brown thing up there in the branches? That's a bird's nest up in the tree. I wonder if there are any baby birds in the nest?
◇ See that bulldozer? It's that big machine with a big blade in front of it. It's clearing out a place where they're going to build a new house.
◇ Today, we're going to go to a special park. There are some statues in the park. Statues are those big objects that look like people. Before we go, let's look at some pictures of statues and talk about them. When we get back, I want you to tell me what statues you saw.

- Invite visitors to your classroom.

  - Classroom visitors can teach your children a great deal. They can bring interesting objects or animals to talk about with the children. Visitors can talk about their jobs or their hobbies or show pictures of faraway places they have seen or tell stories about life long ago.

Teaching about Numbers and Counting

Many children enter preschool with some knowledge of numbers and counting. They can count five to ten objects accurately and can also read some numbers. But many other children have not developed this knowledge. These children in particular need many opportunities to learn the words for numbers, to count things, and to learn to read and write numbers.

You can help your children to learn about numbers and counting in many ways, including these informal ways:

- Make pointing to and counting objects part of your daily routines.

  - As you pass out the juice cups at snack time, point and count the cups; as you pass out pieces of paper for an art project, point to the paper and count the pieces; count the children's boots as you help take them off; count the stairs as the children walk down them.

- As you point and count, get the children to count with you. Children need to hear and practice things a lot in order to learn them.

◇ Let's all count the pictures on the wall. (*You and the children count 1,2,3, as you point to each picture.*)

- Help the children learn to answer the "how many?" question.

◇ Let's count the puzzles on this table. (*You and the children count 1, 2, 3, 4, as you point to each puzzle.*) Oh, there are four puzzles aren't there?
◇ Now let's count the games on the table. (*The children count 1, 2, 3, as you point to each game.*) There are three games on the table.

- Children like to point to and count their fingers, their legs, and their ears. (Don't forget the "how many?" question.)

Here are some other activities that you can use to help the children with numbers and counting:

- Use different types of macaroni. Encourage them to sort the different types and then count them.

- Have materials on a choice shelf such as buttons, rubber teddy bears, marbles, and colored cotton balls.

◇ Give children rulers and let them measure different things around the room.

- Teach the children counting songs and rhymes. Play clapping and counting games. (You can play these games with many different actions, and as the children learn number words, they can count more actions.)
- Sing counting and rhyming songs using felt board pieces that you can add and take off.

◇ We're going to clap three times. (*The children clap three times, counting for each clap.*) How many times did you clap? (*The children say, "Three times."*)
◇ We're going to jump five times. (*The children jump five times counting each jump.*)
◇ I am going to clap and I want you to listen for how many claps you here. OK, now you clap how many claps I did.

Here are some ways that you can help your children learn to recognize and write numbers:

- When they play with number puzzles, encourage them to say the numbers as they put the pieces in the puzzles.
- Have them include numbers in the pictures that they draw and in the words and "stories" that they write. For example, "What's the street number for your house that you drew?" "Wow, you wrote a long story. Can you number all of those pages?"
- Read and discuss number and counting books, pointing and counting the objects on each page.
- Encourage the children to make their own counting picture books by cutting and pasting pictures of objects on pieces of paper, using stickers, or printing paint bottles, then counting and writing the number for "how many?" on each page.
- Keep pencils, crayons and paper around the room so that the children can make lists and write directions.

In addition to learning about counting and writing numbers, young children need experiences that will help them to learn words and ideas that are particularly important to their future success in arithmetic and mathematics. You can help your children by

- Using words such as s*ame, different, more than, less than,* and *one more* as you compare groups of objects.
- Naming the first, second, third, fourth, and last items when you talk about things in a line or a series. Use activities that are interesting to young children to help teach these ordinal terms. For example, when cooking ask the children, "What do you think the first ingredient will be? OK, what is the second thing we should add to the bowl?"
- Using location words: *in back of, beside, next to, between.*
- Teaching them to learn to recognize, name, and draw different shapes, and by combining some shapes to make new or bigger shapes.
- Making comparisons between objects: "taller than," "smaller than."
- Measuring things first with nonstandardized measure such as string or strips of paper and then move on to standardized measures such as rulers, scales, and measuring cups and discussing why we need to measure things.
- Arranging groups of objects according to size—from largest to smallest.
- Helping them learn to copy patterns and to predict what will come next.
- Matching objects that are alike.
- Describing similarities and differences among objects.
- Sorting objects into groups by a given feature (the same color, the same shape). Sorting by groups (animals, cars, buildings). Discussing why objects are the same.

Checking Children's Progress

The more you know about children's academic, social, and emotional development, the more able you will be to meet their needs. Information about how well the children are progressing helps you to plan your teaching. You want the children in your care to feel successful and confident, but you also want to offer experiences that will help them to develop further. In addition, through initial screening and by checking the children's progress, you can identify those children who need special help or who face extra challenges.

Here are some ways that you can keep track of children's progress:

- Observe them daily. Watch as they play with each other, respond to your directions, participate in activities, and use language to communicate.
- Collect samples of their drawings, paintings, and writing.
- Keep notes about what they say and do.
- Encourage them to talk about their own progress.
- Regularly assess your children's skills so that your instruction will meet their needs.
- Talk with parents and caregivers. Ask them what they have observed at home. Tell them about their children's strengths. Let them know about any concerns you may have.

Also, remember to talk often with the children about what they are doing. Be sure to focus on their strengths—what they can do and the progress they have made. This will help them build confidence and stay motivated for learning.

Communicating with Parents and Caregivers

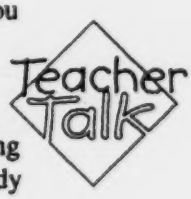
As a teacher, you and the children's parents and caregivers are partners in helping to get the children ready for future school success. Good communication with parents and caregivers can build support for and strengthen the important work that you are doing in the classroom.

It is important for you to communicate with parents and caregivers because:

- They will have a better understanding of how you are helping to prepare their children for success in school.
- They will learn how well their children are progressing in developing the building blocks of learning.
- They will learn ways in which they can help their children at home.
- You will have a better understanding of the background and experiences of the children.
- The children will see that the adults in their life care about them and are interested in their learning and development.

Here are some ways that you can communicate with parents and caregivers:

- Talk with them as they deliver and pick up their children.
- Send home newsletters, notes, or e-mails to inform them of what their children are learning in your classroom.
- Schedule regular meetings to let them know how their children are progressing—both the areas of strength and the areas that could use more support at home.



◇ Jason's doing a great job of learning his letters. Maybe he can show you tonight how many he knows!

◇ Amanda is having a little trouble talking about the stories that I've been reading to the class. It would probably help if you could ask her to talk about the stories you read to her at home. When you've finished reading a book, you could say something like, "Amanda, can you tell your teddy bear what that story was about?"

Encourage parents to:

- Talk with children during daily routines such as when riding in the car and during meal and bath times.

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- Help children to name objects in their environment (labeling).
- Read and reread stories.
- Recount experiences and describe ideas that are important to them.
- Visit libraries and museums.
- Provide opportunities for children to draw and print, using a variety of implements, such as markers, crayons, and pencils.

Share ideas with them about activities that they can do at home to build on what you are doing in the classroom.

◇ R is a hard letter to write. You can help Randy practice his R and writing his name and then together come up with other fun words that start with the letter R.

◇ Here's a book that Lucas was interested in today. It is about animals. Maybe you can go to the library and get another book that talks about animals. You can also take this book and read it and talk about which animals he likes the best and why.

◇ As you know, today we went on a field trip to the grocery store. Please, ask Ellie to tell you some of the things we did.

- Invite them to visit your classroom at any time.

Some Helpful Terms to Know

Here are some terms that you may encounter as you read more about early childhood education.

Alliteration The same consonant sounds at the beginning of words in a sentence or a line of poetry. For example, the sound of *P* in ***Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.***

Alphabetic principle The understanding that written letters systematically represent sounds. For example, the word *big* has three letters and three sounds.

Big books Oversized books that allow children to see the print and pictures as we read them.

Cognitive development Children's developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions, which help them to think about and understand the world around them.

Decoding The translation of printed letters into words in order to pronounce words and obtain their meaning.

Emergent literacy The view that literacy learning begins at birth and is encouraged through participation with adults in meaningful literacy-related activities.

Environmental print Printed materials that are a part of everyday life. They include signs, billboards, labels, and business logos.

Explicit instruction Teaching children in a systematic and sequential manner.

Experimental writing Young children experiment with writing by creating mock and real letters and by organizing scribbles and marks.

Invented spelling Phonemic-based spelling where children create their own nonconventional coding.

Letter knowledge The ability to identify the names and shapes of the letters of the alphabet.

Journals Writing books in which young learners scribble, draw, and use their own spellings to write about their experiences.

Literacy Includes all the activities involved in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and appreciating both spoken and written language.

Phonemes The smallest parts of spoken language that combine to form words. For example, the word *hit* is made up of three phonemes (h-i-t) and differs by one phoneme from the words *pit, hip* and *hot*.

Phonics The relationships between the sounds of spoken language and the individual letters or groups of letters that represent those sounds in written language.

Phonological awareness An awareness of sounds of language and includes separating syllables into onset rhymes portions and separating individual syllables into sounds.

Print awareness The knowledge that printed words carry meaning and that reading and writing are ways to obtain ideas and information. A young child's sensitivity to print is one of the first steps toward reading.

Scaffolded instruction Support provided by adults that allows children to perform complex tasks.

Sight vocabulary Words that a reader recognizes without having to sound them out.

Vocabulary The words we must know in order to communicate effectively. *Oral* vocabulary refers to words that we use in speaking or recognize in listening. *Reading* vocabulary refers to words we recognize or use in print.

Word recognition Using any one of a number of strategies such as recognition by sight, decoding (sounding out), or analogy.

What is Scientifically Based Reading Research?

Some federal programs may have a specific statutory or regulatory definition of this term. In general, scientifically based reading research includes concepts such as those below.

Scientifically based reading research uses scientific procedures to obtain knowledge about how young children develop reading skills, how children can be taught to read, and how children can overcome reading difficulties. Scientifically based reading research has the following characteristics:

1) It uses clear, step-by-step methods of gathering data. These methods involve careful observations and measurements. Often, experiments are used to gather information. For example, an experiment may compare how well children learn to read when they are taught in different ways.
2) It uses established, acceptable ways of measuring and observing. Let's say a researcher is trying to find which type of instruction best helps children learn the meaning of new words. The researcher must decide how to measure the children's word learning. Should the children just be asked whether they know the word? Should they be able to recognize the correct definition among several choices? Or, should they be able to use the new word correctly in their writing? The way the researcher chooses to measure word learning must be acceptable to other researchers as a good, or valid, measure of word learning.
3) It requires that researchers use established, acceptable ways of making sense of, or interpreting, the data they gather. Researchers must show that the conclusions they reach follow logically from the data they collected. Other researchers must be able to draw the same or similar conclusions from the data, and similar experiments must produce similar data.
4) It requires that several other researchers have carefully reviewed the report of the research. The report must include enough specific information about the research so that other researchers could repeat the research and verify the findings. These expert reviewers must agree that the research was done carefully and correctly and that the conclusions follow from the data. Usually, scientifically based reading research is published in professional journals and presented at professional meetings so that other researchers can learn from the work.

Scientifically based reading research provides the best available information about how you can help prepare the young children in your care for learning to read in school.

Suggested Reading

Here are some books that can provide you with more information about early childhood education.

Adams, M. J., B.R. Foorman, I. Lundberg, and T. Beeler (1997). *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children: A Classroom Curriculum.* Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Anderson, R. C., E.H. Hiebert, J.A. Scott, and I.A.G. Wilkinson (1985). *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading.* Champaign, Ill.: Center for the Study of Reading, Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education.

Burns, M. S., P. Griffin, and C. Snow (Eds.). (1999). *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success.* Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Dickinson, D. K. and P.O. Tabors (2001). *Beginning Literacy with Language.* Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Hart, B. and T.R. Risley (1995). *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children.* Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction.* Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Neuman, S. B., C. Copple, and S. Bredekamp (2000). *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children.* Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Neuman, S. B. and D.K. Dickinson (2001). *Handbook of Early Literacy Research.* New York: Guilford Press.

Schickedanz, J. (1999). *Much More than the ABCs.* Washington, D.C.: NAEYC.

Snow, C. E., M.S. Burns, and P. Griffin (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

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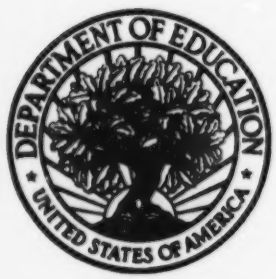

Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force
U.S. Department of Education
U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources

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7 Super Things Parents & Caregivers Can Do

1. Talk often with your children from the day they are born.
2. Hug them, hold them, and respond to their needs and interests.
3. Listen carefully as your children communicate with you.
4. Read aloud to your children every day, even when they are babies. Play and sing with them often.
5. Say "yes" and "I love you" as much as you say "no" and "don't."
6. Ensure a safe, orderly, and predictable environment wherever they are.
7. Set limits on their behavior and discipline them calmly, not harshly.

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